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## **Testimony of State Senator Brad Hoylman-Sigal Before the Landmark Preservation Commission On The Certificate of Appropriateness for West Park Presbyterian Church**

Good afternoon, commissioners. I am State Senator Brad Hoylman-Sigal, and I represent the 47th Senate District, which encompasses the West Side of Manhattan from Christopher Street to West 103rd St., including the historic, 133-year old West Park Presbyterian Church. I'm here today to echo Community Board 7's resolution from June 2022, and the efforts of Council Member Gale Brewer and preservationists such as Landmark West! and the New York Landmarks Conservancy. I urge you to reject West Park Church's hardship application.

As you know, permitting the demolition of a landmark on the grounds of hardship is an extremely rare occurrence. [Only 13 such applications](#) have been granted in the entire history of the LPC. Granting this application for hardship would permit owners of historic buildings throughout our city to engage in demolition-by-neglect when preservation becomes too costly. That is precisely the circumstance that the creation of our Landmarks law sought to prevent.

Most recently, the Church has become a burgeoning home for the arts, thanks to the Center at West Park, which has built upon West Park's mission for spirituality and social justice, including serving as the launching pad for the social services organization, God's Love We Deliver, at the height of the AIDS epidemic. As a testament to its local importance, community members have worked tirelessly to help preserve it, raising over \$3 million. Last Saturday, over 250 Upper West Siders rallied inside the church to bring attention to its fate and celebrate its central role in the neighborhood. We were also joined by local luminaries such as Mark Ruffalo, Amy Schumer, Wendell Pierce, and Harlem pastor Reverend Derrick McQueen. Their message was clear- this Church is too important to our community to be sacrificed due to the lack of consideration of alternatives.

As the case of West Park Church shows – if we want to protect beautiful, historic buildings, we can't encourage demolition-by-neglect. Instead, the complexity of this situation demands creativity, compromise, and attention to our past – not another sacred structure reduced to rubble. I strongly support Council Member Brewer's efforts to honor the landmark designation of this sacred and special place. As Community Board 7 noted in its June Resolution – demolition is simply not the only option. And unlike most other options, it is irreversible.

I'm not here to demonize the developer and especially not the church and its membership – which is dealing with a difficult and complex financial issue. But with such a rich history at stake, this conversation cannot be focused on the first test – the economic analysis and a reasonable return for the developer. If this hardship application is approved, what is the return for the community? What's the return for the other religious congregations that will lose their spiritual home? The artists who will lose their performance space? The dancers and musicians who will no longer have studios in which to perform?

I urge the LPC to reject today's hardship application and give the community more time to explore alternatives to demolishing the church, allowing the second test to be fulfilled, acknowledge the renewed effort to raise the necessary funds to purchase the building from the church, as well as innovative ways to preserve the structure of the church while proceeding with development in order to generate revenue. As stated earlier, in the history of LPC, our city has abandoned 13 such landmarks to the wrecking ball – we should not let West Park Church be the 14th.